

Democracy and its discontents: an alternative to elections

Electing representatives to make grave and consequential decisions for us has ceased to work (if it ever did). Here's why: it fosters *infantilism* in the electorate and *entrenchment* in the proxy, both of which form ripe conditions for the ascendance of a class of oligarchs.

If Donald Trump had not won the 2016 election, if instead Hillary Clinton had won, we would be further from even *the sight* of a serious problem with our system of government, let alone, any solution. It would likely have meant the prolongation of a system of democracy that many serious thinkers have become convinced is not sustainable.¹ The system of government we are familiar with where representatives of the governed are *elected* to positions of law-making power has become morally bankrupt. Its failure to live up to all but a pernicious semblance of its ideals was predicted. Sometimes the semblance of an ideal is worse than the complete loss of it.

*Trump is a symptom, not the cause of this failure of electoral democracy. Protest Trump. Impeach him if you can but be prepared to bleed.*²

The central cause of the failure is a flawed conception of what human beings are like.³ This conception has allowed the semblance to survive at scale as long as it has.

Such a massive and fundamental failure was hidden from view by the institutionalized illusion that human beings in positions of power can be trusted to remain incorruptible in the face of overwhelming temptation to appease and be appeased. The system allows *capture* of its ideals by the interests of both individuals and groups much smaller than the full set of the governed. The system of electoral democracy demands nothing less than saints be in power and saints have always been in short supply.

The system of representative democracy practiced in the United States⁴ has evolved into a streamlined process of generating and preserving concentrations of power. Whatever its stated function, whatever may have been envisioned by the architects of the system, *the concentration of power* is what it has become the most efficient method of producing. A conclusion something like

1 Some might ask: might Trump himself not be swallowed by the system? Become no less its expression than a more conventional politician?

2 An allusion to Joni Mitchell's "A Case Of You."

3 It's hardly news that human beings are fundamentally flawed. Moralists have been harping on it for millennia, from [Diogenes](#) to [E. M. Cioran](#). Before God died, it used to be called "sin." Guess what? Even with God dead, people are still fucked. It's time we accept and learn to manage it. Electoral representative democracies presume that this is not so, that under quite ordinary pressure politicians will *not* cave to subverting the understood ideal of what democracy stands for. No, original sin is not making a comeback. The claim here is empirical and well-documented by history. Recall Benatar's Pollyanna principle. It is the role of history to counter that instinct that makes us see great hope where there is only more of the same. It is only room temperature water we throw on human aspiration. Not especially cold.

4 And in much of the so-called "developed" world.

this is what a small, but growing, number of scholars in political and economic science and in philosophy are coming to realize and articulate.

Democracy is good. Whenever anyone even hints otherwise, the quip attributed to Churchill⁵ is trotted out. In a moment of resigned exasperation, he famously said, “Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the rest.” Because Churchill said it, is it so? More specifically, even if we accept that it is the best form government may take, it remains a question how it is instantiated working with human material as we find it.

Representative democracy in its electoral form is responsible for Trump.⁶ So much the worse for representative democracy in its electoral form. Philosophical discontent has been brewing for a long time with the notion, but Trump... well, what can we say? Enough of complaints. It’s time to get down to the brass tacks of governance.

We will explore arguments for and objections against one interesting alternative system of democratic government, “lottocracy.” It claims to better achieve the two central desiderata of any theory of government: *responsiveness to the governed* and *good governance*.

5 Churchill actually said “Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time....” Churchill was quoting someone else when he said that. We still don’t know who. Here he expands on the significance of the term for him: “How is that word ‘democracy’ to be interpreted? My idea of it is that the plain, humble, common man, just the ordinary man who keeps a wife and family, who goes off to fight for his country when it is in trouble, goes to the poll at the appropriate time, and puts his cross on the ballot paper showing the candidate he wishes to be elected to Parliament—that he is the foundation of democracy. And it is also essential to this foundation that this man or woman should do this without fear, and without any form of intimidation or victimization. He marks his ballot paper in strict secrecy, and then elected representatives and together decide what government, or even in times of stress, what form of government they wish to have in their country. If that is democracy, I salute it. I espouse it. I would work for it.” —House of Commons, 8 December 1944. [See Richard Langworth, “Democracy is the worst form of Government...”](#) Of course, Churchill never meant *any* man or woman was worthy of so fine an institution. The man who helmed Britain during “its finest hour” was not above promoting a “raw white supremacism and a concentration camp network of his own.” [See Johann Hari, “Not his finest hour: The dark side of Winston Churchill”](#). Had Hitler never existed, we would still have had Churchill to compare the thug-of-the-day to. See Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made*, Henry Holt and Co., 2010. “[T]he Aryan stock is bound to triumph” said ~~Adolf Hitler~~ Winston Churchill.

6 We suggest that Trump is the logical outcome of an absurd system. A *reductio* of a sort. To those who point out that he did not win the popular vote, we suggest that merely winning the popular vote (even leaving aside the electoral college) is not enough. An essential problem with democracies scaled to accommodate electorates of millions is that they cannot decisively resolve who wins except when it happens by very wide margins. A victory premised on a mere three million popular votes is not wide enough to enforce a mandate. Increasingly, as class divisions widen, mandates are necessary. Anything less adds to the already excessive drag on the credibility of the system.

Problems with electoral representative democracy

If there is one thing scholars on both the right (Bryan Caplan, Jason Brennan) and left (Robert B. Reich) agree on it is that the American electorate is ignorant when it comes to what their government is doing or supposed to be doing or even who it consists of. This is hardly news. There are ample studies that have established this fact over and over again. Consider that:

- Only about 34% of Americans can even name the three branches of the federal government: executive, legislative, and judicial.
- Only 38% of Americans know which party currently controls the House of Representatives or the Senate.⁷
- “About 22 percent of Americans can name all five of the fictional ‘Simpsons’ family members—Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie. But just one in 1,000 people surveyed could name all five freedoms granted under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.”⁸
- If a crazed killer approached random American millennials and asked them to name just one of their state’s senators or face instant death, 77% would die.⁹

In order to responsibly decide who shall represent them in government, a voter cannot limit their knowledge of the political issues to what they are told by the media at election time. And that is about the only time anyone seems to pay attention to who is running for what and what they stand for—and even then for mostly just one office: the presidency. This is why we get the government we have. What government is that? One unrepresentative of any reality but that of a small number of well-placed members of the polity. They are well-placed because 1) they have a vested interest in controlling political outcome, and 2) they have the means to *actually* affect outcomes. The two reasons reinforce each other. Why bother to surmount my indifference if, not only perception but reality, too, tells me I will do better to expend my efforts to improve my life in other ways?

Does this mean the electorate is stupid?

One is not stupid for not knowing something one does not need to know, or something knowledge of which would be idle in one’s epistemological economy, something knowledge of which would

⁷ A now dated “recent Annenberg Public Policy Center poll finds that only 38% of Americans know that the Republican Party currently controls the House of Representatives, and a similar number know that the Democrats control the Senate.” Actually, both houses are in Republican control as of 2016. See also Forbes.

⁸ [Livescience, “Doh! Americans Know ‘The Simpsons’ Better than First Amendment.”](#) The First Amendment, FYI: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

⁹ [Politico, “Poll: Majority of millennials can’t name a senator from their home state.”](#) There is nothing that I am aware of that would make millennials special here. They only happened to be the target of this poll.

detract from resources one would be more rational to invest in learning about, something more pertinent to one's needs and desires or even the needs and desires of others. Is political knowledge in electoral representative democracy more like knowing the performance statistics of one's favorite sports star or, instead, like knowing how to build a house, do CPR, or bake a cherry pie? Knowledge of the latter sort can certainly come handy on occasion. But what's so wrong about finding joy in amassing trivia? Nothing, none at all. Except when it comes at the expense of more useful skills. Really? But how often does political knowledge have practical utility or even entertainment value. When was the last time a politician bought you lunch? Or made you laugh?¹⁰ That once-every-four-year contest and spectacle, can be fun, but most of us find it gets old quickly by comparison to many, more engaging or productive, distractions or activities. So where do we get off insinuating that the names of the Simpson's aren't more important than knowing about those five freedoms? Honestly, when has knowing that you have the freedom to petition the government to address your grievances ever actually solved a problem for you?

No, most people are sufficiently conversant with reality to know what it makes sense for them to know for the limited purposes most people have most of the time. In politics, as in any field, deep knowledge by all who may be affected by its possession is neither required nor desirable. It matters only that some people have this deep knowledge or know how to access and interpret it. And, for representative purposes, it also matters greatly that these knowledgeable people very likely share your values and outlook on the world. How is this convergence of values between you and your representative supposed to come about?

Types of representation

There are at least two obvious ways in which your values and outlook on the world may be shared by those who represent you. One is sometimes called *proxy* (or responsive) representation; the other, *indicative* (or descriptive) representation.

Proxy representation is what we are most familiar with in electoral representative democracy. It should be no accident that the legislator you vote for expresses more or less views similar to yours. You vote for them for exactly that reason. You want them to enact laws and policies that reflect what you would do in their place. They are selected by you and like-minded members of your community to stand in for you, to act as your proxy in government.

Indicative representation, however, shouldn't be that strange to us either. Anyone familiar with experimental methods in science will easily grasp this other way of achieving representation. If you want to determine whether something is true about a large target population, you take, examine, and conclude some truth about a representative sample of the target population. A medical researcher, for example, who wants to know whether a certain drug works to treat an ailment that afflicts the general population, will take pains to select a random sampling from the population on whom to test the drug's efficacy. It is important to avoid bias in order to achieve

¹⁰ Except as ready objects of derision.

credible representation. If the target is people in general, selecting only members of one sex or age or class or racial group may taint the conclusion of the study. If bias is carefully avoided, we can say the sample group truly represents the target population or that it is *indicative* of what we expect would be true of the larger group. This method is responsible for much of scientific progress.

The problem with proxy representation

If your representative, in the proxy sense, could be trusted to actually legislate as you would in their place (minus the pressures about to be cited), we would not have a problem. But that is not the case. It isn't that your representatives are necessarily bad, or ill-intentioned, or especially corruptible people. It is, in fact, that they are *in one very important sense* very much like the people who vote for them and whom they are supposed to be representing: they are not saints. Just like their constituents, under the right stresses, they will cave to serve ends they were presumably not elected to serve. They stray too often quite dramatically from their original mission even with the best intentions. They do so with documented regularity. They do this because the pressures arrayed against them are immense, and getting bigger. They are expected to spend great quantities of their time soliciting fortunes merely for the chance to remain in office long enough to accomplish even very modest effects. They must literally "buy time" to accomplish anything. And the price of "political time"—time in office—is in the millions; collectively, in the billions. And if deep-pocketed interests offer them the resources to buy time in office, how can the legislator avoid not paying special attention to these interests? It is either compromise, or stick to your principles and be outspent at the next election. Moreover, to accomplish anything requires establishing connections and forming relations with many well-healed interests over a very long time. As a well-intentioned elected legislator, you no doubt enter the representation business believing that somehow in time your persuasive powers will in the end move these moneyed interest to partake in your identification and sympathy with your constituents. But to pull that off, you must stay in office and make a career of it. And since the political business is a high maintenance enterprise, somebody must make a serious financial investment in you, as a legislator, for that to happen. Thus, as an elected legislator, others become invested in you and you must become invested in the process of keeping them invested. This is called "capture" by political philosopher Alex Guerrero. The original point of representing the interests of constituents affected by the decisions you help to make fall by the way side. You say, "we can always kick the bums out, right?" But the pool of bums from which the replacements will come will be under the same pressure. The system facilitates capture and makes it all but impossible to resist.

Does it happen that elected politicians, the best of them, actually succeed in moving mountains of money to democratically responsive ends? Does it ever happen that the moneyed interests actually fail to get what they want? The science is in. Political scientists in the United States, Canada, the UK and around Continental Europe have conducted massive studies on decades of survey data comparing what people in electoral democracies say they want and what their law-makers deliver.

If your annual income is in ninetieth percentile—over about \$150,000 in 2017 dollars, the answer is yes. More often than not politicians do what you want. Otherwise, no luck. So, unless ten percent of the population is the new meaning of the word “majority” in a democracy, we are not talking “democracy” anymore.

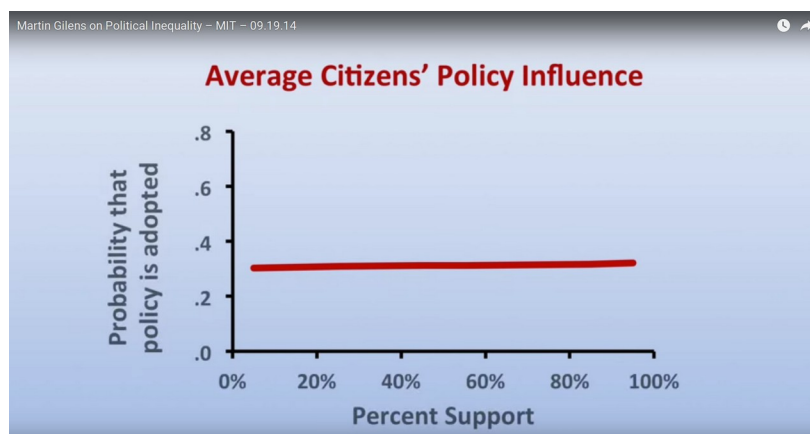
Is democracy dead?

We don’t mean in South American banana republics, or countries in the heart of Africa or the fringes of Asia decorated with faux presidents,¹¹ or in “struggling” democracies anywhere. The verdict from the experts is that it is dead right here, *in the U. S.*¹² And in the U. K. and in other parts of the Western Europe, too.

In a landmark 2014 study, political scientists Martin Gilens (Princeton) and Benjamin Page (Northwestern), looking at data from over two decades, conclude:

In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover... even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it.

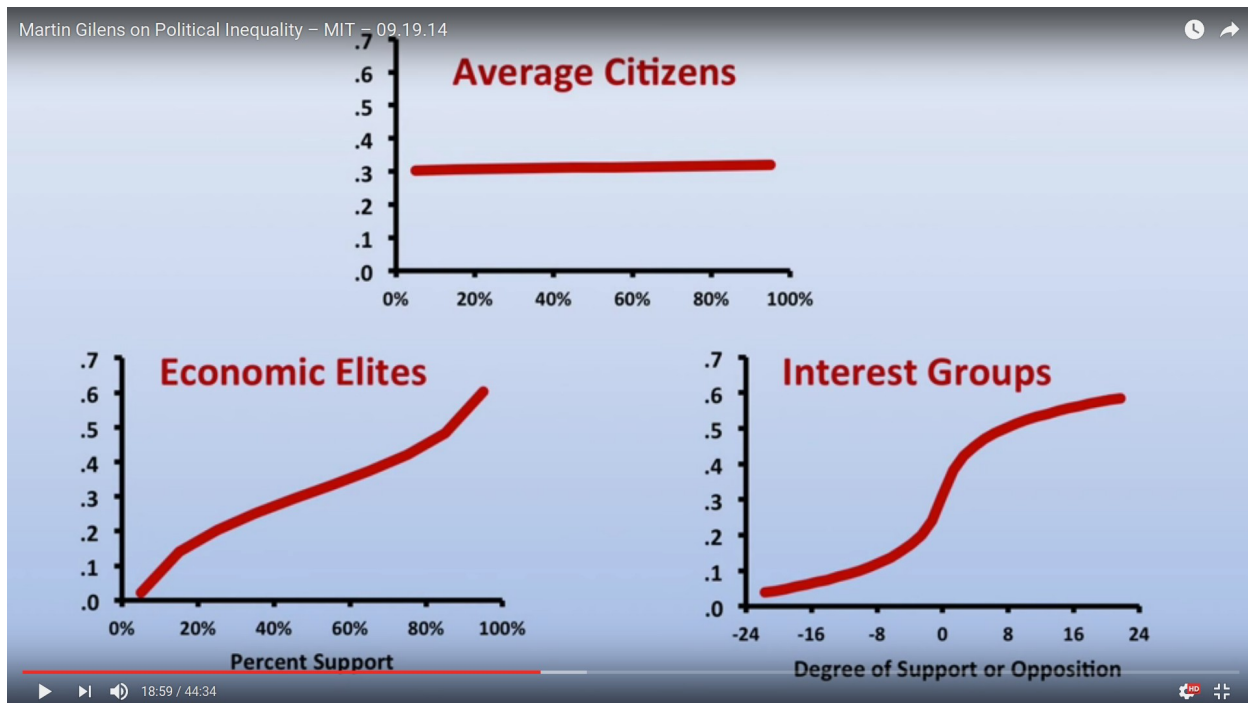
“Economic elite domination” is the term of art Gilens and Page use, eschewing the “O” word—oligarchy—to describe the situation. Others are not so coy.



Gilens' infamous curve: the difference the popularity of a policy makes to the probability that it will be adopted: notice the slope...

11 The “Democratic Republic of the Congo” or “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.”

12 See John Cassidy, “Is America an Oligarchy?” *New Yorker*. Brendan James, “Princeton Study: U.S. No Longer An Actual Democracy,” *TPM*.



Democracy or?

Supposing you still believe in democracy, what's to be done?

Martin Gilens believes we can through a massive concerted effort work to reform electoral democracy so that it is more representative. But it is hard to see how this can happen through existing political mechanisms which have become what they are for the express purpose of concentrating power in the hands of those who obviously value that power. Of what value is the abdication of power to them? Why should they give it up? Do we really think they somehow amassed such power inadvertently? That all they need is to be reminded that democracy is hurting and they will cough up the authority? There may have been a point earlier in this development when serious reform of the democratic representational infrastructure was a possibility. Is that still true?

Some of us do not think it is. Moreover, the reform must be radical and go to the core of the representational defect. Attempts at reform have been made in the past. That we are here again in greater need than ever of more reform is testimony of their lack of success. The problem is elections are not a viable way to achieve legitimate representation at the scale of large democracies. Indeed, electoral representation begins to breakdown as soon as the numbers exceed more than a few hundred. By the time we reach millions, the effect is virtually homeopathic. The problem is that large electoral structures cannot accommodate the realities of such numbers. Ideal democracies are small. The U.S. Supreme Court would be a paradigm example where the transparency of direct democracy is evident.

But direct democracy---even apart from the mechanics of pulling it off for electorates of millions for which a technological solution is conceivable---has an epistemological worry. There is nothing intrinsic to crowds that makes them wiser decision makers. The practical problem of educating law-makers adequately is immense.

Moral and political philosopher Alex Guerrero suggests *representative* democracy has two principle advantages over *direct* democracy

1. Practical implementation: not everyone can, or wants to, or even should devote resources to government.
2. Epistemic opportunities to make correct decisions

But the virtues of elected representation are tied to *meaningful* accountability.

Trump as *reductio*

A standard tactic in argumentation is to assume a proposition, see what follows from it via incontrovertible rules, and then assess the outcome and note that for it to be true too many other things widely accepted to be true would have to be false. In other words, the conclusion will not fly. It is absurd. Experimental procedures can work that way, too. Suppose a very large number of people are unhappy with their lives in two especially important ways: First, materially they do not perceive themselves to be making progress. The economic prospects for their children are no better, if not worse, than they were for their parent's generation. Second, their sense of community, of taking pride in something they *are* just in virtue of being the kind of persons they see themselves as. Their inherited values, culture, ways of being and doing in the world are no longer treated with respect by the powers that determine the conditions of their lives. Such a population—with neither money nor pride to call their own—is ripe for desperate measures. If someone dazzles these discontents with promises of recovering a mythological time when it seems things were better than now, what do they have to lose?¹³ You, invested as you are in a progressive vision, with all your facts, your education, and the wherewithal to wait out the bad times, will not understand them when their patience with your promises is suddenly exhausted. They don't believe you. Better someone who at least entertains with their lies. There are boring lies and fun lies. You can guess which wins out.¹⁴

But the problem with electoral representation in democracies pre-dates Trump by decades.

Is democracy inherently flawed?

¹³ “What do you have to lose in voting for me?” was refrain Trump used in his election.

¹⁴ Works with facts, too. The five First Amendment freedoms do not etch memory as well as the five major Simpson characters.

Somebody asked on a philosophy discussion forum whether democracy was *inherently* flawed. The short answer is no. People are.¹⁵ But the question does raise a problem about what any system of government must be to be functional for such people—for an inherently flawed demos. Before all else, it must be premised on our flawfulness.

Remember, if humans weren't this way, what would be the point of government at all? If we were always and everywhere falling over each other to be considerate of each other, we might need bandages, but not government of any sort. So, that not being the case, what sort is best?

There aren't that many possibilities. Either one person rules, some people do, or nearly all. Briefly, to remind ourselves, here are the pros and cons of each:

First, *autocracy* is by far the most efficient form. If, in times of stress,¹⁶ we almost always defer to the one wisest and strongest among us to call the shots, *why not all the time*? Mainly, because the situation suffers from the contingency that even in the best of cases where nothing but high regard for the well-being of the governed drives the autocrat, you can bet such virtue is not heritable. Good autocracies are short-lived. But more fatal, there is the problem of dependency. It is not just that you cannot always be there to decide what is best for your dependents, but when will they ever learn if they aren't given a chance to fail?

Second, *oligarchy*—rule by a few—is far more stable.¹⁷ Distributing your eggs among different baskets has a prudential charm. The odds most break or go rotten at once are somewhat lessened. Still, when they do go, they go big time. Few things are more difficult than to take power away from a gang of the powerful. Rolling one autocratic head is easy. The aisles of history are slippery with the blood of the numbers of heads that must sometimes roll when concentrations of power have become entrenched. The virtue of stability devolves to a liability of entrenchment.

Finally, there is *democracy* or rule by the many. In theory, at least, it's been all the rage for some time. There is a continuum between oligarchy and democracy. Rarely, is it ever all—the whole lot—of the governed that is meant by the “people” or demos. Usually, it means a class of “the

¹⁵ [Here](#). Similarly, gun rights advocates are correct: guns don't kill people, people do. Alright then, what's to be done about people? Because the possible consequences of even one irresponsible owner of such armaments are too great and for that reason too unacceptable. How can we better educate people to use them responsibly? More to the point, why haven't we *already*? What has stood in the way? If the answer is we don't need to go to the expense, given that the vast majority of gun owners are responsible, why not legalize the private possession of heavy artillery or nuclear weapons? Numbers matter. An occasional innocent dead as a result of private gun ownership is something we can live with in light of the great sense of security we derive from owning a gun. Some mistakes we can afford, others we cannot. If this is the rational tradeoff we are asked to make, it invites the question of *the number* of mistakes we can afford. Where is the cutoff? While a purely political answer to that question may survive for a time, politics is internally static. When politics moves, it is because *moral pressure is ever in the direction of reducing the number to zero*. One mistake is one too many. Other interests we have may more often prevail, but *morality knows no moderation*. That's how we know we are talking morality—and not expedience, politics, etiquette or something else.

¹⁶In the military, for example, or in families with small children, voting is not usually taken seriously in strategic decisions.

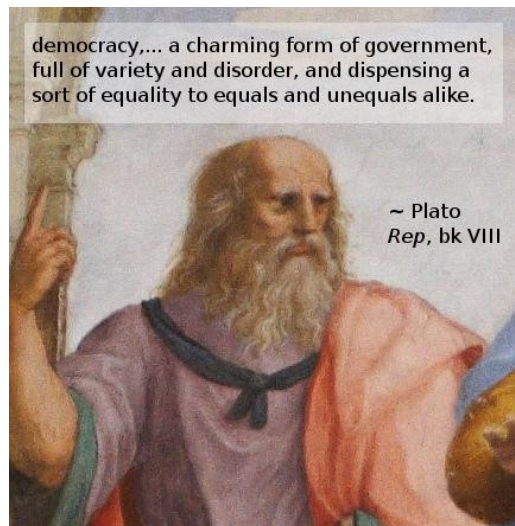
¹⁷See note 9.

qualified,” a subset of the governed normally much larger than is the case with a typical oligarchy. But some of the governed are just not in a position to contribute much to governing: animals, children, the mentally deficient. Some we don’t want to contribute to the cause: incarcerated felons, murderers, for example. And some we think shouldn’t for other reasons: we don’t trust or like them: foreigners, and maybe even those too poor to be adequately invested in the material ideals of the majority—which suggests *there are some people we don’t want there to be too many of*. It would break down community. A community can only handle so much diversity before it ceases to be one at all, some would argue. And aren’t they right? (Or is any community smaller than the whole of humanity or the rational agents inhabiting the universe not worthy of protection? I leave these critical questions about the *scope* of democracy open, for now. At some point, though, they will need to be answered.)

Because it’s been fashionable for the past century or so, we will dwell on forms of democracy.¹⁸ It has two core advantages over autocracy and oligarchy, one practical and one moral:

1. By distributing power, democracy *implicates* the preponderance of the governed in the business of governing, and
2. does *honor* to their, at least, theoretical ability to be rational and responsible agents.

By implicating most, if they screw it up, they have only themselves to blame. They were all in on it. Basically, it makes them partners-in-crime but also—just maybe—ready to be adults. It does



this by getting the bulk of the governed involved¹⁹ in decision-making that will have real consequences for not only how they will live but even what they take themselves to be, how they regard themselves. The autocrat and oligarch are too easily made targets for blame. The ease of targeting them does nothing good for those who bear the brunt of the autocrat’s or oligarch’s abuse. When it is clear that there is no one but ourselves to blame, the theory goes, we linger less on responsibility and skip ahead to what may be done. The hope is, after a sufficient period of failure, we learn.

But exactly *how* is the mass of people, the demos, going to govern itself?

¹⁸ So much that governments better described as autocracies or oligarchies flaunt the title. Portions of U.S., for example, have been dropped from the extension of the term. See “North Carolina is no longer classified as a democracy”.

¹⁹ How involved? This is more about the efficacy of an illusion than substantive involvement. See the writeup on Voting for more on this question.

Historically, philosophers have not been too keen on democracy. Plato, in *The Republic*, thought it a prelude to the worst possible form of government: a tyranny, involving an autocrat selected in the desperation that failing democracies leave in their wake.²⁰ Such autocracies are especially ripe for the worst abuses of governance imaginable. Mob rule—for Plato, another name for democracy—was just a bad idea considering the general lack of wisdom to be found in crowds.²¹

Nevertheless, Plato's vision of a neatly organized separation of powers each doing what it does best in an epistocracy of sorts, and the whole harmonizing into a sustainable political entity seemed blind to the second virtue of democracy: its potential for inducing maturation in the otherwise childlike individuals comprising the governed population. A method of governing is not merely to be judged on outcome. The process of governing must *transform* the governed. This is the moral requirement. Otherwise, we are herding cats with no end beyond herding them.²²

20 Robert Michels (1911) called it an “iron law” that democracies devolve to oligarchies. An anonymous wikipedia author sums it up admirably: “The ‘iron law of oligarchy’ states that all forms of organization, regardless of how democratic they may be at the start, will eventually and inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies, thus making true democracy practically and theoretically impossible, especially in large groups and complex organizations. The relative structural fluidity in a small-scale democracy succumbs to ‘social viscosity’ in a large-scale organization. According to the ‘iron law,’ democracy and large-scale organization are incompatible.” It is easy to draw more than one conclusion from this insight. Michels himself became a fascist. But there are ways to parse the iron law, extract the truth in it, while treating what ails the practice of democracy. This will involve a critical view of the nature of human beings, manifestly, one not fully appreciated by thinkers like Michels and many others. First you survey human landscape, then like a structural engineer, you design and build to suit the foundation materials. Something about democracy is morally defensible. We will try to put our finger on what that is. But much of what currently attends it is not: in particular, the popular notion that democracy and elections must go together. They do not. Elections at scale are inherently vulnerable to degradation.

21 The idea that “there is wisdom in crowds” is a mistake. True, sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts but as often not. Crowds conduce to moral irresponsibility too extreme to pin on any one member. The quality of the whole can depend on, among other things, what you take to be valuable. If even a collection of individually wise people can make stupid joint decisions, what makes you think that a bunch of idiots putting their heads together will produce wisdom? There may be wisdom in the procedure for extracting wisdom from crowds but not in the crowds themselves. That procedure is in fact what we seek here in explaining how the virtues of democracy might be instantiated.

22 In my experience, cats do best unherded. You have the burden of showing that you have a worthy end in trying to herd them. Not so with humans whose mandate for consciousness enlargement is unconstrained. It is never enough merely to get people to behave right, hard as that might be, when they are also capable of behaving so in full awareness of why it is right and out of respect for this.

Thus, we have to balance two things: the need for order to prevent Hobbes' nightmare²³ and the necessary moral space for individuals to show their mettle.²⁴ To these ends, we need *a procedure*. What shall it be?

It is a common supposition, but incorrect, that democracy goes together inseparably with elections. We happen to have an *electoral* representative democracy for historical reasons but there is nothing special about electoral representation—at least as far as achieving the virtues of democracy is concerned. Conceptually, *the idea of elections and the regard for the dignity of the individual that democracy gestures at are quite separable*. We will return to this point momentarily.

The purest form, *direct* democracy—where each affected expresses their preference on every stricture, allowance, or decision, is unwieldy on the scale of modern nation states. It may have worked for tiny Greek city states, it may for town halls, the Supreme Court, and other practically enumerable (i.e., small) communities. And though it may become *technologically* feasible to scale up direct democracy to fit an electorate of millions, the very speed of the facility is one argument against it. There is reason to think that technology, at least in this application, is counterproductive. Humans cannot *deliberate*²⁵ at the speed of light. Any attempt to speed it up would be an abdication of responsibility, any facility toward that end morally dubious.

But the idea of choosing proxies, people who share in some credible degree your perspective and values, as your representatives to a governing body is the reigning form democracy takes. Electoral representative democracy is what nearly everybody nowadays thinks is the cat's pajamas on the shelf of government types. But it has become increasingly clear to a growing contingent of thoughtful people that it is not working as intended. It is not working to produce the best governance possible nor the most responsive. Electing representatives to make grave and consequential decisions for us has ceased to work (if it ever did). Here's why: it fosters *infantilism* in the electorate and *entrenchment* in the proxy, both of which form ripe conditions for the ascendance of a class of oligarchs.

23 "Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short." The Leviathan (1651), The First Part, Chapter 13.

24 The moral space requirement, by the way, is the only justification for elevating "liberty" to such a high place as, for example, the American Constitution and derivative rhetoric accord it. J. S. Mill alludes to its utility, but that is a practical, not a moral concern, notwithstanding utilitarianism. (Elsewhere, I argue that utilitarianism is a moral heuristic, not a proper moral theory.)

25 Become informed, evaluate alternatives, consult experts, weigh their testimony, work out consequences, etc.

What might be done about it?

We mentioned indicative or descriptive representation as a method at determining factual information about a target population. It is a standard procedure for generalizing in scientific investigations. Alex Guerrero has suggested we try it as replacement for electoral representation.

Here's how Guerrero's proposal would work: groups of people from the governed population would be randomly selected to form *single issue legislatures*. There might be one legislature for health, one for foreign trade, labor, defense spending, social services, education, transportation, infrastructure, commerce, and so forth. Perhaps there would be as many fifty such "single issue lottery-selected legislatures" or SILLs. Each legislature would consist of, say, three hundred members, all *randomly selected from the population that has to live under laws this SIL creates*. They would be committed to serve for three years. Their terms would be staggered so that in any one year only one hundred members would be new. They would be educated on the job by the best vetted experts in the legislature's field of focus. Service would be voluntary but highly incentivized. Their service would be considered a high honor and they would be well-compensated to the tune of between five hundred thousand to a million dollars for each of their three years of service. With the service and the compensation would come the obligation, however, to receive no compensation from any other source during and for a long time after their service, on pain of very severe penalties.

These SILLs would have the authority to call on experts, to evaluate them, to consult the public and to deliberate with each other in order to pass laws and policies that would affect all of the governed. SILLs would replace congress, and the role of the executive branch would be diminished to that of a service to the government of laws enacted by the SILLs. The judicial branch would remain, however, much the same.

...

"the Aryan stock is bound to triumph" — ~~Adolf Hitler~~ Winston Churchill

...

Interview on the Gilens study:

<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/princeton-scholar-demise-of-democracy-america-tpm-interview>

A history professor's ruminations:

<http://www.a-w-i-p.com/index.php/2014/11/17/america-s-pseudo-democracy>

Churchill: "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.":

[https://www.google.com/search?q=churchill+""democracy&biw=1920&bih=899&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjx_OnDxIPRAhUBVWMKHWO5CNYQ_AUIBigB](https://www.google.com/search?q=churchill+)

The quote is not from Churchill: <https://richardlangworth.com/democracy>

"I don't think you have to believe America is chained to its past and is necessarily doomed to reenact it. But when you study civilizations, it tends to be true that history has a weight, a gravity — if you're going to go in an opposite direction, you need to consciously exercise an opposite force. And I don't see us doing that." -- Ta-Nehisi Coates

<http://www.vox.com/conversations/2016/12/19/13952578/ta-nehisi-coates-ezra-klein>

Guerrero's Aeon article:

<https://aeon.co/essays/forget-voting-it-s-time-to-start-choosing-our-leaders-by-lottery>

Guerrero's lecture on lottocracy:

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/political-philosophy-2/lecture/ZKSHm/lecture-7-4-1-the-promise-of-lottocracy>

Why representative democracy doesn't work: it doesn't fit our contemporary lifestyle.

Summary of Guerrero:

<http://disinfo.com/2014/02/lottocracy-arrived-say-goodbye-good-riddance-campaigns-candidates-elections/>

How to find out how your congressperson voted:

https://www.senate.gov/reference/common/faq/how_to_votes.htm

Would ‘lottocracy’ be a better form of government than democracy?

<http://suffragio.org/2014/01/23/would-lottocracy-be-a-better-form-of-government-than-democracy/>

“44 per cent of US Congresspersons have a net worth of more than \$1 million; 82 per cent are male; 86 per cent are white, and more than half are lawyers or bankers.”

If the US Congress were representative²⁶ of the American electorate, more than 50% of Americans would be millionaires, 81% would be male, 86% per cent would be white, and more than half would be lawyers or bankers.

<http://money.cnn.com/2014/01/09/news/economy/congress-millionaires/index.html>

Women in congress: <http://fortune.com/2016/11/10/election-results-women-in-congress/>

Actual number of millionaire households in the US: 8.3%

<http://millionairecorner.com/Content/Free/there-are-ten-million-millionaires.aspx>

non-Hispanic White percentage (63% in 2012)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_and_ethnicity_in_the_United_States

“Democracy, which is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequaled alike.” Plato had Socrates say.

Resources on alternatives to electoral democracy

Not everyone has the time to prepare for these meetups so I am offering a graduated list of resources to prepare you for this topic. Starting with a lively video interview with comedian/

²⁶In the *indicative* sense of term, the same as used to describe a sample vis-a-vis the target population in scientific studies.

activist Russell Brand and culminating with Alex Guerrero's properly hedged, watershed philosophical defense of "lottocracy" published in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2014).

Proceed at your own risk!

1. Russell Brand and Jeremy Paxman, [“Don't Vote it Only Encourages Them”](#) (video).
2. [Whose right? Russell Brand or Bill Maher and Kyle Kulinski](#) (aka., Mr. “Step-by step-rationality”)? (video).
3. What's *really* wrong with elections? No idea? To get just a hint see this [short video lesson on Plato's philosopher kings](#). We've recently questioned [the rationality and morality of voting in a recent meetup](#).
4. To cast aspersions on electoral democracy elicits the question, “what's the alternative to voting?” It's high time to stop asking that rhetorically, and *actually* consider real alternatives. Ted Wachtel's offers [a five minute video pitch](#) for random lottery.
5. Moral and political philosopher Alex Guerrero's [Aeon article](#) gives a nice introduction to the virtues of selecting our law makers randomly, i.e., lottocratically.
6. Alex Guerrero's hour long video lecture, [“Governing By Lottery: May The Odds Be Ever In Your Favor”](#) features a question and answer period where the obvious objections are raised and addressed.
7. If you want to sink your teeth into what is probably the most well articulated theory of lottocracy to date, I recommend Guerrero's Coursera course. The whole of which is accessible by joining Coursera. It's free if you just want read and listen in on the lectures. These three short ones get to the heart of the matter: [Lecture 7.4.0: The Lottocracy](#), [Lecture 7.4.1: The Promise of Lottocracy](#), and [Lecture 7.4.2: Concerns About Lottocracy](#)
8. Finally, Alex Guerrero's seminal paper [“Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative,”](#) *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2014)